

*Carmel, NY* – Congressman John Hall (NY-19) led a roundtable discussion on employment and education for veterans today at the Yorktown campus of Mercy College. Topics addressed at the roundtable included making the transition from the battlefield to the classroom and to the work place, dealing with PTSD back in civilian life, finding military friendly colleges, utilizing the GI Bill for further education and connecting veterans to employers.

Among those joining Rep. Hall at the roundtable were Andy Person, director of Institutional Effectiveness and Veterans Affairs at Mercy College; John Moulton, associate director of veterans affairs at Mercy College; Donna Renella, a human resources professional working with veterans; and Joshua Van Strander, veterans service assistant who works in Rep. Hall's office as part of the House of Representative's Wounded Warrior Program and is a U. S. Army veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan face remarkable challenges, both from their experiences serving in combat and from our stagnant economy," said Rep. Hall. "It is our responsibility as Americans to make sure that when these brave men and women return home they have access to the best healthcare and benefits, and are able to get an education and support their families.

Many of the veterans studying at Mercy College are taking advantage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, landmark legislation that provides a full four-year education to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Rep. Hall remarked that although the new GI Bill has been successful at offering thousands of young veterans the chance to afford college, there is still room for improvement in the bill. To this end, he has co-sponsored legislation in Congress to expand the benefits to include all technical schools and vocational programs, paying for more than one certification test, ensuring that all members of the Guard and Reserve who served on active duty are eligible for benefits and making living allowances for distance learners fair.

Congressman Hall has also introduced legislation that would require the Veterans Administration to utilize direct deposit when giving veterans their benefits under the GI Bill. Previously, the VA could require that veterans come to VA Regional Offices in person to receive some benefits.

"I support efforts to make sure that colleges and other institutions make a fair assessment of

the skills that veterans learn during their service towards receiving college credit,” said Rep. Hall. “I know this is an issue that Josh has dealt with, and that many veterans find frustrating once they return to civilian life.”

Speaking about unemployment amongst recent veterans around the United States, Rep. Hall said it is at unacceptably high levels, and added that in New York, it may be as high as 20%.

“Veterans return from their service with an expansive skill set and leadership qualities that are hard to find in the workforce, so employers should want to hire veterans,” said Rep. Hall, who pointed out that in Congress he voted to create a Veterans Work Opportunity Tax Credit that allows businesses to write off 40% of the first \$6,000 dollars it pays to a newly hired veteran--a \$2,400 tax incentive in total. Rep. Hall said he has spoken recently to U. S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) about the need to renew this tax credit, which is scheduled to expire at the end of this year, and that it will be “one of my highest priorities when I return to Congress next year.”

Mercy College was recognized this year as one of the top 15 percent of colleges and universities in the nation when it comes to embracing America’s veterans as students, according to G.I. Jobs magazine.

Active military and veterans have a number of advantages at Mercy College, such as professional mentors, flexible study options, and an affordable, high-quality private education. Advisors work closely with military students to ensure that they receive optimal GI Bill educational benefits as well. Additionally, the college’s innovative Personalized Achievement Contract (PACT) program aligns students with professional mentors to ensure a smooth transition between military and student life.

“We are very pleased to host this roundtable discussion at Mercy College,” said Dr. Kimberly R. Cline, Mercy College president. “These efforts are critical to ensuring that our veterans make a successful transition from military service to life at home, in a college setting, and in the job market. We thank Congressman Hall for his significant work in assisting veterans.”

Congressman Hall serves on the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and is chairman of the Veterans’ Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

